40278

National Library of Canada | Bibliothèque nationale du Canada

CANADIAN THESES ON MICROFICHE | THÈSES CANADIENNES SUR MICROFICHE

NAME OF AUTHOR/*NOM DE L'AUTEUR* PINEAU, LOIS I.

TITLE OF THESIS/*TITRE DE LA THÈSE* An Analysis of Some Aspects of Hume's Theory of Belief

UNIVERSITY/*UNIVERSITÉ* of Alberta

DEGREE FOR WHICH THESIS WAS PRESENTED/ *GRADE POUR LEQUEL CETTE THÈSE FUT PRÉSENTÉE* M.A.

YEAR THIS DEGREE CONFERRED/*ANNÉE D'OBTENTION DE CE GRADE* 1978

NAME OF SUPERVISOR/*NOM DU DIRECTEUR DE THÈSE* DR. BRUCE HUNTER

Permission is hereby granted to the NATIONAL LIBRARY OF CANADA to microfilm this thesis and to lend or sell copies of the film.

The author reserves other publication rights, and neither the thesis nor extensive extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's written permission.

L'autorisation est, par la présente, accordée à la BIBLIOTHÈQUE NATIONALE DU CANADA de microfilmer cette thèse et de prêter ou de vendre des exemplaires du film.

L'auteur se réserve les autres droits de publication; ni la thèse ni de longs extraits de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans l'autorisation écrite de l'auteur.

DATED/*DATÉ* Oct. 4/78 SIGNED/*SIGNÉ* [signature]

PERMANENT ADDRESS/*RÉSIDENCE FIXÉ* 76 ALCINA AVENUE
TORONTO, ONTARIO
M6G 2E8

NL-91 (3-74)

National Library of Canada

Cataloguing Branch
Canadian Theses Division

Ottawa, Canada
K1A 0N4

Bibliothèque nationale du Canada

Direction du catalogage
Division des thèses canadiennes

NOTICE

The quality of this microfiche is heavily dependent upon the quality of the original thesis submitted for microfilming. Every effort has been made to ensure the highest quality of reproduction possible.

If pages are missing, contact the university which granted the degree.

Some pages may have indistinct print especially if the original pages were typed with a poor typewriter ribbon or if the university sent us a poor photocopy.

Previously copyrighted materials (journal articles, published tests, etc.) are not filmed.

Reproduction in full or in part of this film is governed by the Canadian Copyright Act, R.S.C. 1970, c. C-30. Please read the authorization forms which accompany this thesis.

THIS DISSERTATION
HAS BEEN MICROFILMED
EXACTLY AS RECEIVED

AVIS

La qualité de cette microfiche dépend grandement de la qualité de la thèse soumise au microfilmage. Nous avons tout fait pour assurer une qualité supérieure de reproduction.

S'il manque des pages, veuillez communiquer avec l'université qui a conféré le grade.

La qualité d'impression de certaines pages peut laisser à désirer, surtout si les pages originales ont été dactylographiées à l'aide d'un ruban usé ou si l'université nous a fait parvenir une photocopie de mauvaise qualité.

Les documents qui font déjà l'objet d'un droit d'auteur (articles de revue, examens publiés, etc.) ne sont pas microfilmés.

La reproduction, même partielle, de ce microfilm est soumise à la Loi canadienne sur le droit d'auteur, SRC 1970, c. C-30. Veuillez prendre connaissance des formules d'autorisation qui accompagnent cette thèse.

LA THÈSE A ÉTÉ
MICROFILMÉE TELLE QUE
NOUS L'AVONS REÇUE

NL-339 (3/77)

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

AN ANALYSIS OF SOME ASPECTS OF HUME'S THEORY OF BELIEF

by

© Lois I. Pineau

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY

EDMONTON, ALBERTA

Fall, 1978

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA
FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, for acceptance, a thesis entitled An Analysis of Some Aspects of Hume's Theory of Belief submitted by Lois I. Pineau in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

.....Bruce A. Hunter.....
Supervisor

.....P. G. Edwards.....

.....L. J. Macdonald.....

...W. W. Rozeboom...

Date. August 21, 1978....

TABLE OF CONTENTS

		PAGE
	Introduction	v
CHAPTER		
I.	ONTOLOGY, REALITY	1
II.	THE CAUSAL THEORY	15
III.	UNCAUSED BELIEFS AND VIVACIOUS NON-BELIEFS	24
IV.	REASONING AND NECESSITY	34
	Reflective and Non-Reflective Belief	34
	General Rules	37
	Certainty	40
V.	BELIEF AND ABSTRACT IDEAS	47
VI.	EXISTENCE AND BELIEF	55
	* * *	
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	70

Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to give a critical analysis of Hume's theory of belief. I cannot possibly, within the bounds of this essay, deal with every aspect of that theory. I shall therefore confine my analysis to those theoretical claims that seem central to Hume's main project. My primary concern will be with Hume's claim that belief arises from causation. I shall examine that claim with the aim of discovering (1) the intelligibility of that claim, as Hume states it, and (2) the plausibility of such a claim. In considering the intelligibility of the claim I shall be concerned mainly with the consistency and coherence with which the claim is stated; in considering its plausibility, I shall look to its consequences and explanatory value.

Central to Hume's theory of belief is his claim that belief is nothing more than a perception that distinguishes itself from perceptions that are merely conceived by virtue of its force and liveliness. He distinguished two kinds of belief, that attending present impressions and that attending the lively ideas related to or associated with present impressions. Whereas he thought that impressions were believed simply by virtue of their force and liveliness, he argued that in order for an idea to have the force and liveliness requisite to belief, it must be causally related to a present impression.

Hume also claimed that "there is no impression nor idea of

any kind, of which we have any consciousness or memory, that is not conceived as existent" (p. 66).[1] If the only difference between conception and belief is in the forcefulness of what is conceived or believed, then it follows, that everything we believe, we believe to be existent.

This doctrine gives gives rise to a number of problems. The major problem consists of the question of what Hume supposed we believed when we had a lively idea or impression. Did we believe the idea to be existent or the object the idea was of to have existence? In other words, did Hume distinguish between objects and ideas of objects.

The second problem is how Hume could have accounted for the fact that beliefs are propositional. Beliefs may be true or false, but if a belief is nothing more than a perception this does not seem possible. Perceptions, like tables, may not be false; only the things we say about them may be false. But Hume does not seem to want to say that beliefs are about perceptions. He claims that they are perceptions. It does not seem, then, that we could ever have a false belief. I argue that Hume does provide criteria for the truth and falsity of belief, but that his justification of the criteria is inadequate.

Also, if a belief were nothing more than a perception, we would not be able to have the belief that an object does not exist. In order to be able to believe then an object does not

---

[1] Hume, David, A Treatise of Human Nature, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1968. All cited page references are from this edition.

exist it must be possible for us to conceive of it as not existing. It would not do just to conceive of an idea as existing, as opposed to believing it to be. Merely conceiving of an idea is only a case of not believing it. It does not follow from the fact that I do not believe that an object exists that I believe an object does not exist.

These difficulties may be partially resolved by a more careful look at some other aspects of his theory. Hume's theory of objects reveals that any idea, impression, or complex of ideas and impressions counts as an object. However, it happens that only certain objects are believed to exist, and this by virtue of the relations they hold to other objects.

Hume's theory of general ideas and his constant reference to the existence of propositions lends support to the view that Hume believed that perceptions had propositional significance. This suggests that Hume was wrong to claim that belief is nothing more than a lively perception. What he should have claimed is that belief is the propositional significance of a lively perception.

The realization that Hume distinguished between more than one kind of existence suggests a partial solution to the problem of whether it is possible to believe that an object does not exist. He distinguishes between the existence that all objects or perceptions have, and the real existence that we attribute only to some objects. The difference between our conception of the first kind of existing object and the second

kind consists of the relations which we conceive the object to hold to other objects. I argue that when we conceive of an object as having real existence, in Humean terms, we conceive of it as part of a larger picture in which it has certain relations to other objects. When we conceive of it as not having real existence, we conceive of a larger picture in which the object exists but where it does not have the relations with other objects requisite to real existence. The object is thus conceived of as existing at the same time that it is conceived of as not having real existence. Thus it would be possible, I argue, for a person to conceive of two pictures of an object, side by side. In one picture the object would have real existence, in the other, it would only exist. Then, whichever of the pictures presented itself in that manner, belief would be suspended.

The major flaw in Hume's theory is that he gives no explanation of how the second picture of an object only existing (and not having real existence) could ever have the requisite force to constitute belief. It is neither a present impression nor causally relation to a present impression, and Hume sees impressions as the only source of the vivacity that constitutes belief.

In what follows I shall begin with an account of the metaphysical underpinnings of Hume's account of belief. I shall then deal, in chapter two, with Hume's claim that belief is caused, and in chapter three, with the apparent exceptions to

this claim and Hume's attempt to explain these exceptions away. In the next chapter I shall explain the criteria of the truth and falsity of belief as well as examine the adequacy of that criteria and the justification of the assumptions on which it is based. In chapter five I deal with the question of whether Hume's theory can account for the fact that most of our beliefs are of a general nature, and in chapter six I raise the question of how far Hume's theory goes toward accounting for the fact that we have beliefs concerning the non-existence of objects.

Chapter I

Ontology and Reality

In The Treatise, Hume attempts to explain belief in terms of the operation of the understanding on the data presented to it. In order to understand his account of belief, then, it is necessary, first, to understand what he took this data to consist of as well as what he claimed the operations of the understanding were.

All the operations of the understanding, according to Hume, consist of the occurrence of perceptions and their manipulation and production in accordance with three principles of association, resemblance, contiguity, and most importantly, cause and effect. Perceptions divide into two classes. There are impressions, "which comprehend all our sensations, passions and emotions, as they make their first appearance in the soul" (p. 1), and ideas, which are "the faint images of these in thinking and reasoning" (Ibid.). Perceptions may also be single or complex, "simple perceptions or impressions and ideas are such as admit of no distinction nor separation. The complex are contrary to

these, and may be distinguished into parts" (p. 2). Simple perceptions are particular colours, tastes, and smells. Complex perceptions are conglomerates of these.

Hume claims that particular but distinguishable tastes, smells and colours may unite to give us a perception of an apple. "Tho' a particular colour, taste, or smell are qualities all united together in this apple, 'tis easy to perceive they are not the same, but are at least distinguishable from each other" (Ibid.). But he is not very clear on what he means by a particular colour, taste, or smell. The implication is that each of the particular impressions could or would occur alone if it were not joined together with other impressions in the apple. But Hume admits that colour impressions, to take one instance, do not occur separate and apart from impressions of shape and size. We cannot observe the colour orange apart from patches and dots and visual fields of orange. Colour and form are not separable in reality. One cannot be removed from the other like an apple from a basket. According to Hume, "when a globe of white marble is presented, we receive only the impression of a white colour dispos'd in a certain form, nor are we able to separate the colour from the form" (p. 25).

Colour and form are however, distinguishable by a distinction of reason. Hume recognized the difficulty of understanding what is meant by a 'distinction of reason', "since it implies neither a difference nor separation". He explains

that although at first "the mind wou'd never have dreamed of distinguishing a figure from the body figur'd, as being in reality neither distinguishable, nor different, nor separable" (p. 25), through the comparison of a particular object with other similar objects we eventually

> begin to distinguish the figure from the colour by a distinction of reason; that is, we consider the figure and colour together, since they are in effect the same and indistinguishable, but still view them in different aspects, according to the resemblances of which they are suspecptible. (Ibid.)

Whether Hume thought that particular ideas were those ideas which were separable in reality, or those that were distinguishable by a distinction of reason is important only insofar as particular ideas are possible objects of belief. If ideas like particular patches of red are the simplist impressions, then it would seem that the colour red could not be an object of belief; only a particular patch of red could be. However, if those ideas distinguishable by a distinction of reason are the simplist impressions, then it would seem that a particular colour, and not just a particular patch of colour could be an object of belief.

An exact interpretation of simple ideas, is not, fortunately, crucial to the subsequent discussion. However, two points should be emphasized. For Hume, all perceptions, simple or complex, ideas as well as impressions, are particular. This means, firstly, that "the mind cannot form any notion of quantity or quality without forming a precise notion

of degrees of each" (p. 18). Secondly, "no object can appear to the senses; or in other words, that no impression can become present to the mind, without being determin'd in its degrees both of quantity and quality" (p. 19). Thus, all ideas present to the mind are fully determinate and are of some precise quantity and quality.

Hume thought that general ideas or general properties, strictly speaking, did not exist. He did not believe that the same idea appeared in different objects and that this was our justification for the judgement that two objects resembled one another. He believed that ideas that existed in one object were different and distinct from the ideas that exist in any other. Objects are judged to resemble each other, not because <u>there is</u> anything by virtue of which they resemble each other, but because the mind has a propensity to associate them. Abstract ideas or, as Hume calls them, general ideas,

> are nothing but particular ones, annexed to a certain term which gives them a more extensive signification, and makes them recall upon occasion other individuals, which are similar to them. (p. 17)

Thus, in admitting general ideas, Hume did not thereby enlarge his ontology. General abstract ideas do not represent an increase in the sensible data on which the mind operates. Instead they are the product of the operation of the mind on particular ideas and impressions. They represent a certain capacity that the mind acquires as a result of its propensity to note resemblances among ideas and impressions.

What Hume seems to rule out is the possibility that a general idea could ever be the object of belief.

According to Hume belief is nothing more than a vivacious, forceful idea. Any given idea may be merely conceived, or it may be believed. The difference has to do with the way the idea presents itself. When it is merely conceived it presents itself as a particular idea, but not especially forcefully or vivaciously. The same idea, presented in a forceful and vivacious manner, is believed. Hume thought that the vivacity that characterizes ideas that are believed arises as a result of the experience of cause and effect.

Hume thought that present impressions causally related to ideas transmitted their own vivacity and forcefulness to the idea, thus causing it to be believed. It is important to distinguish between the claim that when belief is a vivacious idea it is the result of cause and effect, and the further claim that all belief arises from cause and effect. The impressions which, allegedly, transmit their vivacity to the idea believed, are themselves beliefs. In this case, he claims, "The belief or assent which always attends the memory and senses, is nothing but the vivacity of those perceptions they present; and that this alone distinguishes them from the imagination" (p. 86). Whereas he thinks that impressions are the cause of vivacious ideas that are believed, he thinks that we can never know what the cause of impressions are.

> As to those impressions, which arise from the senses, their ultimate cause is, in my opinion, perfectly inexplicable by human reason, and twill always be impossible to decide with certainty, whether they arise immediately from the object, or are produc'd by the creative power of the mind, or are deriv'd from the author of our being. (p. 84)

Thus, when Hume claims that belief is caused by a present impression, he does not mean that all belief is caused by a present impression. Present impressions themselves are not caused by present impressions, yet they are beliefs. What Hume does mean is that all inferred belief is caused by a present impression. Later I shall examine this claim more carefully. For the present I should like to outline one of the difficulties that arises in regard to the answer to the question of what inferred belief caused by a present impression is a belief of.

Hume claimed that only the relation of cause and effect could convince us of <u>real existences</u> not present to the senses.

> Here then it appears, that of those three relations, which depend not upon the mere ideas, the only one, that can be trac'd beyond our senses, and informs us of existences and objects, which we do not see or feel, is <u>causation</u>. (p. 74)

That Hume took these existences to be real is indicated in the preceding paragraph where he claims that only through causation "can the mind go beyond what is immediately present to the senses, either to discover the real existence or the relations of objects" (p. 73). Since present impressions are allegedly the basis of our inferred beliefs in real

existences not present to the senses, it is natural to assume that the present impressions themselves are non-inferred beliefs in the real existence of objects that are present to the senses.

This view is supported by the following passage in which Hume refers to the impressions of the memory and senses, and those ideas connected to them by the relation of cause and effect, as realities.

> 'Tis evident, that whatever is present to the memory, striking upon the mind with a vivacity, which resembles an immediate impression, must become of considerable moment in all the operations of the mind, and must easily distinguish itself above the mere fictions of the imagination. Of these impressions or ideas of the memory we form a kind of system, comprehending whatever we remember to have been present either to our internal perception or senses; and every particular of that system join'd, to the present impression we are pleas'd to call a reality. But the mind stops not here. For finding, that with this system of perceptions there is another connected by custom, or if you will, by the relation of cause or effect, it proceeds to the consideration of their ideas; and as it feels that 'tis in a manner necessarily determin'd to view these particular ideas, and that the custom or relation, by which it is determin'd, admits not of the least change, it forms them into a new system, which it likewise dignifies with the title of realities. The first of these systems is the object of the memory and senses; the second of the judgement. (p. 108)

So there are two systems of reality. The first comprehends all that we remember having seen, felt and heard. The second comprehends all that is inferred from the first system on the basis of cause and effect. Thus, the second system is based on causation; the first is not. What is clear from this passage is that the sort of belief Hume is concerned to

explain is belief in what is real, and his claim that belief arises only from causation is really the claim that the inferred belief that an object has real existence or relations when that object is not present to the senses arises only from causation.

The difficulty with this account arises when we try to explain what it is to believe in the real existence of any object, sensed or unsensed. The The Treatise an object may have existence in three senses and it seems that it may be real in at least two of those senses. Hume claims that "there is no impression nor idea of any kind, of which we have any consciousness or memory, that is not conceiv'd as existent" (p. 66). Thus, everything that can be thought of exists in one sense of the word. I shall refer to this kind of existence as mere existence. Thus, all objects have mere existence. Whether a merely existing object exists in either of the two senses depends on the relations it holds to other merely existing objects. We do not suppose objects having external existence, for example, to be 'specifically different', but only attribute to them different relations, connexions, and durations" (p. 68).

There are two senses in which an object is termed a reality. (1) By virtue of its place in one of the above described systems, i.e. by virtue of the place it holds in either the system of the impressions of the memory or the system comprising all the ideas causally related to those impressions. (2) By virtue of the fact that we attribute to an object an

existence external to and independent of the mind. To say that an object is real by virtue of its place in a system is not to imply that it exists independently of the mind. One may believe that it is true of an object that it belongs in a particular system and not believe that it exists independently of the mind. Conversely, one may take an object to have an existence independent of the mind, and not believe that it has a place in either of the systems described above. An example of the first kind of belief is Berkeley's belief that there is no tree in the quad when there is no one there to perceive it. He might have believed that it was real if by real we meant only that it was part of a system of sensations, but have believed that it was not real in the sense that it existed independently of the mind. An example of the second sort of belief would be the belief that there are leprechauns, even though one did not remember ever having seen one. Thus, the belief that an object is real in one sense does not imply that the believer believes that it is real in the other sense.

The question then, is whether Hume thought, when he claimed that cause and effect could inform us of the real existence of unsensed objects, that it informed us of the real existence of objects in the first sense, or in the second sense. It is quite clear from what Hume says in 'Of scepticism in regard to the senses' that cause and effect can only inform us of what is real in the first sense. In 'Of Scepticism in regard to the senses' Hume argues that the belief

that objects have real existence in the second sense, i.e. that they have existence independent of the mind, and that they continue to exist when they are not being perceived, is false. It is based on neither sensation nor reason, (Hume includes as reason, the relation of cause and effect) and is due to the activity of the imagination (p. 193). He thinks that he proves that whatever is not perceived does not exist; that no object continues to exist independently of the mind (pp. 210-211). At the same time, he believed that reasoning based on cause and effect could inform us of what was true.[1]

In his introduction to The Treatise Hume claims that in what follows he is providing the foundation for "a compleat system of the sciences, built upon a foundation almost entirely new, and the only one upon which they can stand with any security" (p. xx). The foundation Hume proposes to provide consists of a set of rules and principles. By following them, he claims, we may discover true causes and effects.

This is not an easy task. Natural phenomena are

> compounded and modified by so many different circumstances, that in order to arrive at the decisive point, we must carefully separate whatever is superfluous, and enquire by new experiments, if very particular circumstance of the first experiment was essential to it. (p. 175)

The discovery of true causes requires careful experimentation and observation. Hume thinks that in carrying out these

---

[1] H.H. Price, Hume's Theory of The External World, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1940, pp. 105-113. Price discusses the fallacy of Hume's argument.

experiments and observations we should be guided by the following principles: Like causes produce like effects and whenever there is a difference in effect we must expect a difference in cause. We are warned not to draw conclusions from a few experiments, but to "extend our observation to every phenomenon of the same kind" (p. 174) and to be constantly alert to the existence of compounded effects "which arise from several different parts of the cause" (Ibid.). If we take care withour investigation, we may, whenever we observe there to be a constant conjunction between objects, where one kind of object is contiguous in space and time and prior to the other kind, conclude that the one kind of object is the cause of the other.

Thus causal reasoning, rigourously pursued, informs us of true causes. True causes are those realities related to present impressions by the relation of cause and effect. These realities are so called because they are part of a system and not because they have an existence independent of the mind. In fact, causal reasoning, Hume argues, can never convince us of that (p. 193).

The following passage provides further evidence for the view that in informing us of what is real, causal reasoning informs us of what is true. "Truth and falshood consists in an agreement or disagreement either to the real relations of ideas, or to real existence and matter of fact" (p. 458): But since it is false that any object has an existence independent of the mind (according to Hume) causal reasoning

cannot inform us of what is real in that sense. If it did, then what was true would consist in an agreement with what was false and to believe what was false would be to believe what was true. Thus, the only way in which causal reasoning could conceivably inform us of what was true is if it informs us of the real existence of an object, where an object is real by virtue of its place in a system.

This raises the question of the way in which causal reasoning informs us of the real existence of unsensed objects. Hume's conclusion, that the rules governing judgements concerning causes and effects were the only ones on which science could be established with certainty, was not based on his faith in the validity of inductive reasoning. He was fully aware that inductive reasoning could not establish the truth of any conclusion concerning real existences.[2] Indeed he argued that since there is no necessary connection between any two kinds of objects, however often they have appeared in conjunction with each other in the past, there is no logical difficulty in supposing that one might appear without the other in the future. He concluded that there was no rational justification for the maxim that every object must have a cause, and that there is no necessary connection between any kind of object we call a cause and that kind of object we call an effect.

---

[2] N. Kemp-Smith, The Philosophy of David Hume, London, MacMillan, 1949, p. 88, p. 401, p. 405.

Hume recognized that sceptical arguments showed that we have no reason, demonstrative or inductive, to believe in the real existence of objects. However sceptical arguments have a negligible effect on those beliefs. At best, they can induce us, with much effort on our part, to suspend them. Such an effort, however, can only be temporary. We cannot sustain it and soon return to our unjustified beliefs. The fact that reason has no effect on our judgement in these matters led Hume to conclude that "Nature, by an absolute and uncontroulable necessity has determin'd us to judge as well as to breathe and feel" (p. 183).

Hume wished to convince us that our beliefs were determined, not by reason but by nature. We would not expect him then, to use reason to convince us of this. He believed that our belief in the existence of causes was due to a mental, propensity to associate certain objects that in our experience had always been found in conjunction with certain other objects, with those other objects. Thus observation and experience is the basis of our belief in causation. In attempting to convince us that belief results from cause and effect, Hume utilized the technique that he believed produced belief. Experience, he claimed, is the source of belief, and he attempted to cause our belief by appealing to experience. His methodology, then, consists of basing his conclusions on hiw own experiences, and inviting us to see if we can find in our own experiences anything contrary to what he has found in his. The assumption is that if we cannot, then we will

necessarily come to the same conclusions that he has. In the course of the next chapter I shall examine the question of whether, basing our conclusions concerning cause on effect solely on our observations and experiences, we would, according to Hume's theory, arrive at any conclusions at all.

Chapter II

The Causal Theory

The Cause of Belief

Hume gives the following definition of a belief: "An opinion . . . or belief may be most accurately defin'd, A LIVELY IDEA RELATED TO OR ASSOCIATED WITH A PRESENT IMPRESSION" (p. 96). Belief, he claims, "super-adds nothing to the idea but only changes our manner of conceiving it, and renders it more strong and lively" (p. 101). He claims that the relation between the lively idea and the present impression is always causal: "we find from experience, that belief arises only from causation, and that we can draw no inference from one object to another except they be connected by this relation" (p. 107). It is the vivacity, force, and strength of an idea that commands our assent to it, and Hume seems to be arguing that the only relation capable of producing the requisite strength, force, and vivacity, is that of causation. The relations of resemblance and contiguity may contribute to the enlivening of an idea, but "when single their influence is very feeble and uncertain" (p. 109). Where these relations affect us we may "arbitrarily, and of our mere goodwill and pleasure" (Ibid.) bring to mind the idea. They serve only to augment the force the relation of causation

gives to an idea; they can never be a substitute for it. The relation of causation, in contrast, necessitates the mind to pass from a present impression to a particular idea. It is this necessity that distinguishes the vivacious ideas involved in belief from those other vivacious ideas that have a 'feeble and uncertain' influence.

We must keep in mind that Hume's claim that belief arises only from causation is a claim only about belief in causes and real existences that are not present to the senses. Real objects that are present to the senses are believed, it seems, simply by virtue of the force and vivacity with which they present themselves. But our beliefs in real objects present to the senses, according to Hume, provide the foundation for our beliefs in real objects not present to the senses. Belief in real unsensed objects takes place when the vivacity of a present impression is transferred to the idea associated with it, enlivening it, and thus commanding our assent. However the belief in an unsensed object does not arise until the mind associates the ideas believed with the impression, and this association is not established immediately. It takes place only after the mind has been repeatedly presented with one kind of object (or impression) conjoined with another.

> I find, that an impression, from which on its first appearance, I can draw no conclusion, may afterwards become the foundation of belief, when I have had experiences of its usual consequences. We must in every case have observ'd the same impression in past instances, and have found it to be conjoin'd with some other impression. (p. 102)

Hume concludes from here that "'Tis the present impression, which is to be considered as the true and real cause of the idea, and of the belief that attends it" (Ibid.).

Given what Humes says about causes, this conclusion is untenable. In order for one kind of object or event to cause another they need to have been constantly conjoined in the past. But there is, by assumption, no constant past conjunction between having a present impression and having a belief in an unsensed object. It is only after experience of 'its usual consequences' that such a belief occurs. The sense of the above passage is that even though we are beaten at squash by the same person three times in a row, when we play squash with him the fourth time we are not necessarily determined to believe he will beat us that time as well. Such a belief takes a little longer to establish itself.

Hume does not distinguish between a causal relation and our belief in it. In his definition of a cause he claims that one kind of object causes another only if the mind is determined to pass from it to the other. A cause is

> An object precedent and contiguous to another, and so united in the imagination, that the idea of the one determines the mind to form the idea of the other, and the impression of the one to form a more lively idea of the other. (p. 172)

Hume does not think that objects exist apart from the mind. It would be inconsistent of him to suppose that the causal relation was independent of the mind. The causal relation, he finds, is a mere passage of the mind. An object is a

cause only if it produces this passage of the mind, and it is found to be a cause only after we have repeatedly made the appropriate observations.

In not distinguishing between the causal relation and a union of objects in the imagination Hume presents us with an extremely implausible theory. Suppose that for half of his life a man went to sleep every night before the sun set. Is it plausible to suppose that he would believe it only set half the time? We rarely experience a constant conjunction of any two objects. We do not stay around to notice the consequences of impressions; we blink, turn our head, fall asleep, before the effects of impressions occur. If beliefs depended on regularity of observation we would have very few of them. And if causal relations depended on such observations, there would be very few causes in the world.

Thus, Hume's account of belief fails on two counts. Hume wants to maintain that when one kind of object causes another, the objects occur in constant conjunction. He does not want to maintain that the present impression of one kind of object is found in constant conjunction with a belief in another kind of unsensed object. But he does want to hold that present impressions and beliefs are identical with objects. This leads to the following dilemma. Either he must withdraw his claim that present impressions are the cuase of belief, or he must revise his definition of causation. However, if Hume claims that present impressions are not the causes of beliefs,

but maintains that impressions and beliefs are identical to objects which exist only in the mind, then he must admit that there are no, or at least very few, causes in the world.[1]

This dilemma could have been resolved if Hume had distinguished between objects and our impressions and ideas of objects. If he had conceded that objects have an existence independent of the mind, then he could have maintained that one kind of object causes another whenever that kind of object occurs in constant conjunction with another kind, but that impresssions are not the cause of beliefs. He would have had to give up his claim that belief is the result of our observation of a causal relation between objects. But this claim should be given up. It flies in the face of the fact that we do have countless beliefs that do not depend on past observation of the constant conjunction of objects.

Hume still might have maintained that belief is the consequence of our observations of the conjunction of objects, and whenever we are concentrating our attention on those objects, and whenever there is no interference created by the blinking of eyes or turning of head. Thus, Hume's theory is salvagable, but only if his claims are considerably weakened and only if he is willing to distinguish between the independent

---

[1]We should allow that cause, as Hume defines it, is possible. It is possible that in the past we have always notice two kinds of impressions in constant conjunction. However it is unlikely that this would ever occur regularly enough to satisfy our intuitions on what a cause is.

existence of objects and our perceptions of them.

Before leaving this topic I should like to examine some other possibilities as to what the cause of belief, as Hume describes it, might be. Several answers could be given. Hume claimed that when belief occurred, a new impression, the impression of necessity arose in the mind. This feeling, he claimed, "is nothing but an internal impression of the mind, or determination to carry our thoughts from one object to another" (p. 165). Now Hume could have retained his claim that belief occurs when the mind is necessarily determined to pass from one object to another, even if he cannot show that this passage of the mind results from our observations of the constant conjunction of objects. In fact, the possibility remains that it is this feeling of necessary determination that is the cause of belief.[2]

This possibility seems rather attractive in light of the fact that in the Appendix Hume modifies his claim that belief "is nothing but a more vivid and intense conception of any idea" (pp. 119-120). He realized that many vivid and intense ideas, for example, hallucinations and poetical fictions, were not believed. He claimed that this was because beliefs actually feel different.

> We may, therefore, conclude, that belief consists merely in a certain feeling or sentiment; in something, that depends not on the will, but must arise from certain determinate causes and principles, of which we are not the masters. (p. 624)

---

[2]Hume does not think that we can explain the cause of impressions (p. 6 above). Thus, we should not expect him to be able to give an account of the cause of this one.

He thought that the 'determinate causes and principles' from which this feeling arose, were the same as those that produced the impression of necessary determination, to wit, the principles of causation. It is plausible to suppose, then, that the impression of necessary determination is what transmits the feeling peculiar to belief to the idea believed.

But Hume claims that this feeling is not the cause of belief. It is what constitutes it. If it were the cause, it would consist of some object in conjunction with the idea believed. But Hume is adamant that the feeling unique to belief is not distinguishable from the idea conceived. By this he means that it is not a separate object (although it is distinguishable, I suppose, by a distinction of reason). It is just the conception presented to us in a modified way. Since there is no firmness, intensity, or vivacity apart from the conception, these 'qualities' can neither cause the belief nor be the effect of some other cause. It can only be the firm conception that can be caused, if it is caused.

It is still possible, however to argue that the impression of necessity is the cause of the feeling peculiar to belief. If the feeling peculiar to belief were logically distinct from the feeling of necessary determination, and if one other condition is met, then a non-circular account of the cause of belief could be given. The condition is that Hume distinguish between the causal relation and our belief that one thing is the cause of another. If there is no causal relation without a necessary determination of the mind, then, if belief is

caused by a necessary determination of the mind, there must be a determination of the mind other than the necessary determination alleged to cause the belief. But such a necessary determination would have as its effect another belief, and the cause of that belief would be another necessary determination of the mind. We would thus be involved in an infinite regress.[3] This regress is not benign, for it seems just false that such a regress of eelings of necessary determination exists. Unless we make a distinction between the causal relation and the necessary determination of the mind, then, we cannot give a satisfactory explanation of the cause of belief. However, if Hume makes the bald (if unsupported) claim that a cause is

> an object precedent and contiguous to another, and where all the objects resembling the former are plac'd in a like relation of priority and contiguity to those objects, that resemble the latter (p. 172),

which he does of course, but he means by it that this relation takes place in the mind. If he had claimed that such a relation may occur outside the mind, and if he had made the further (unsupported) claim that the feeling of necessary determination is logically distinct from, and does always occur in conjunction with, belief, then he could have claimed that the feeling of necessary determination was the cause of belief. However, he would have then been faced with the problem of convincing us that the feeling was logically distinct from the feeling

---

[3]This regress was pointed out to me by Bruce Hunter.

peculiar to belief. Unless it sometimes occurs apart from the belief and can be identified independently, he would not be able to do this. And it is not clear from anything Hume says that such a feeling ever could occur apart from the belief.

There is another possibility. The set of observations that we make when we repeatedly observe one kind of object in conjunction with another is itself one kind of object or event. Perhaps Hume should have said that this set of observations (always found in conjunction with belief) is the cause of belief. This is, of course, still assuming that a cause may exist independent of the mind. This claim would be more acceptable than the claim that the feeling of necessary determination is the cause of belief because Hume would not have to explain how the feeling of necessary determination could be distinct from belief. However, on this account he would not be able to account for the feeling peculiar to belief by referring to some other impression that communicated this feeling to. But this is not such a great drawback. It is preferable, it seems to me, to positing some other obscure and unidentifiable feeling as its source.

Chapter III

Uncaused Beliefs and Vivacious Non-Beliefs

Even if we allow that Hume's theory of belief is intended to account only for the beliefs we have in objects or real existences, there seems to be a large number of those beliefs that are produced by other sources. We tend to believe things merely on the basis of others' opinions, or because an idea has been repeatedly presented to us, or, in the case of our belief in the independent continued existence of objects, through a kind of trick of the imagination and reasoning from analogy. In the case of madmen those 'loose fictions' that have the "same influence as the impressions of the memory, or the conclusions of the judgment" (p. 123) are produced, not from causation, but from an "extraordinary ferment of the blood and spirits" (Ibid).

Yet Hume is insistent that belief arises only from causation. In a long argument he attempts to convince us that belief could never arise from any other relation. The candidate relations are resemblance and contiguity. But he claims "there is no manner of necessity for the mind to feign any resembling and contiguous objects; and if it feigns such, there is as little necessity for it always to confine itself to the same without any difference or variation" (p. 109).

Belief, he thinks requires some 'manner of necessity' in order to occur and causation is the only relation that can provide this. Of course, Hume could have been wrong in thinking that causation is the only relation that could cause belief, but he did not think he was wrong. He showed, or thought that he showed, that the relations of resemblance and contiguity could not, by themselves, give rise to belief and that only the relation of causation could.

What Hume does do is relax his criteria for what counts as a relation of causation. He does this in two ways. Firstly, he allows that we may believe some things simply because they are connected in some way with other beliefs that are caused. For example, we might credulous of what others tell us, simply because it has been our experience that they tell us what is true. In such a case we would have no direct causal reason for believing what they had told us, even though we might have a causal reason for believing something else, that they are a reliable source of information, for instance. He also allows that we have a tendency to acquire beliefs through repetition when it is not a repeated conjunction of objects that we experience:

> As liars, by the frequent repetition of their lies, come at last to remember them; so the judgment, or rather the imagination, by the like means, may have ideas so strongly imprinted on it, and conceive them in so full a light, that they may operate upon the mind in the same manner with those, which the senses, memory or reason present to us. (p. 117)

This kind of habit "on many occasions prevails over that which

arises from the constant and inseparable union of causes and effect" (p. 116).

> All those opinions and notions of things, to which we have been accustom'd from our infancy, take such deep root, that 'tis impossible for us, by all the powers of reason and experience, to eradicate them; and this habit not only approaches in its influence, but even on many occasions prevails over that which arises from the constant and inseparable union of causes and effects. (p. 116)

Hume thinks that repetition counterfeits the effects of reasonings from cause and effect. It is able to do this because it is the basis of our reasonings from cause and effect. After all, our belief in that relation is established as a result of repeatedly observing the same phenomena. Much of education relies on repetition and our credence in the opinions of others. It is for this reason, Hume warns us, that we cannot place too much credence on beliefs acquired through education:

> as its maxims are frequently contrary to reason, and even to themselves in different times and places, it is never upon that account recognized by philosophers, tho' in reality it be built almost on the same foundation of custom and repetition as our reasonings from causes and effects. (p. 117)

It is because Hume thinks of repetition as a kind of causation "built on almost the same foundation . . . as our reasonings from cause and effect" that he maintains his thesis that belief does arise only from causation.

This thesis is also maintained in Hume's explanation of the source of our belief in the independent continued existence of objects. He explains that although there are no

grounds for that belief in direct causal reasoning, causation is responsible for our belief in that it disposes us to make certain inferences based on analogy. This propensity of the mind to reason from analogy is the result of its tendency to make causal inferences even when it recognizes that the object that is the basis of our inference is not exactly similar to objects we have observed in the past (p. 142). In this sense reasoning from analogy is a derivative of causal inference. Since our belief in the independent continued existence of objects involves a kind of reasoning by analogy (p. 209), it is not, in Hume's mind, an exception to the claim that all belief arises from causation.

Hume also maintains this thesis when he explains why fictitious ideas do not elicit our belief. It is because they do not have that 'solidity and force' that arises from reasonings from causation. However, when they are mixed with ideas that are believed they have more influence on the imagination (p. 122). Thus, the tendency we have to accept them is a direct result of the connection they have with what is caused.

Hume seems to have taken the beliefs of madmen to be an exception to the rule. It is possible that he considered this exception unworthy of serious consideration. After all, no one took the beliefs of madmen seriously, and Hume was most concerned with beliefs that people do take seriously. One indication of this is that he did not bother to explain this apparent exception, except to say that it was an exception, since in this case belief was the result of a "ferment

of the blood and spirits" (p. 123).

This relaxing of the criteria for what counts as a belief that is the result of causation raises some problems for Hume. He must explain how it is that belief that does not involve a causal inference creates the feeling of necessary determination that distinguishes belief and makes us feel certain of it. We have been led to believe by Hume that the necessity of the idea believed arises due to the necessity with which the mind must pass from the impression of one object to the idea of the other. But there is no necessary inference involved in the case of repetition or accepting the opinions of others. It follows either that beliefs arising from repetition or opinion feel different from beliefs arising from causation, or that repetition and opinion are capable of producing the same feeling of necessity as cause and effect.

If beliefs arising from repetition feel different from beliefs arising from causation, then they ought to be easily distinguishable. Since beliefs based only on repetition and the opinions of others may well be false, we ought to be able to discover which beliefs those are on the basis of their feeling. Anyone who wished to hold only those beliefs that had the proper causal beginnings would be able to reject uncaused beliefs on the basis of their feeling alone. This is not possible, however. Education has the same influences as cause and effect. It "not only approaches in its influence, but even on many occasions prevails over that which arises

from the constant and inseparable union of causes and effects" (p. 116), and repetition "may operate upon the mind in the same manner with those, which the senses, memory or reason present to us". It follows that the only basis for rejecting a belief would be the fact that it did not arise from cause and effect, and not the fact that it did not have the requisite feeling of necessity.

If repetition produces the same feeling as cause and effect, it seems that the process that results in our belief in the independent and continued existence of objects does as well. But the connection of this process with the relation of cause and effect is a fairly indirect one since it is based only on reasoning from analogy and not reasoning from cause and effect.[1] We would expect it, then, to be weaker than beliefs that were directly induced by cause and effect. Yet this belief is one which "almost all mankind, and even philosophers themselves, for the greatest part of their lives" (p. 206) are convinced of. We must conclude that the process that leads to this belief produces the same feeling as cause and effect.

Hume's original grounds for claiming that the relation of cause and effect led to certainty was that our mind was necessarily determined by that relation to believe. The feeling with which we conceived the idea was such that we

---

[1] See p. 38 below.

could not believe otherwise. But if the feeling produced by the causal process could be replicated by other processes, why should we not proclaim the beliefs that result from them to be equally as certain. Why should not the maxims of education, that cannot be eradicated by "all the powers of reason and experience", constitute proofs? Are they not just as free from doubt and uncertainty as arguments based on cause and effect? We cannot, by reason, be convinced that beliefs arising from cause and effect are more likely to be true than beliefs arising from education. If neither reason nor feeling can convince us, why should not beliefs with the requisite feeling be equally as acceptable regardless of their source?

Hume explains that,

> as education is an artificial and not a natural cause, and as its maxims are frequently contrary to reason, and even to themselves in different times and places, it is never upon that account recogniz'd by philosophers. (p. 117)

The answer is that the maxims of education lead to contradictions and beliefs that result from cause and effect do not. This claim, that beliefs that result from cause and effect do not lead to contrary results could have two possible sources. Hume may just be helping himself to the assumption that there is no contrariety of causes in the world, and inferring from that assumption that beliefs arising from cause and effect (and not just apparently arising from cause and effect) are never contrary to each

other.[2] The other possible basis for this claim is empirical. It might be based on the observation that in the past beliefs based on cause and effect, were not, as a matter of fact, contrary to each other. It is hard to believe that Hume could have made this observation. Attempts to base reasoning on causation often lead to incompatible conclusions. We think that this is because at least one of the conclusions is based on apparent causes rather than real causes. But this conclusion can only be based on the assumption that there is no contrariety in nature. Unless we accept that Hume noticed that all beliefs based on reasoning from cause and effect were compatible, we must conclude that his faith in that kind of reasoning is based on the assumption that there is no contrariety of causes.

In Hume's discussion of belief, then, we can discern the following claims:

(1) Belief is certain in the sense that we are necessarily determined to conceive an idea in a particular manner, viz., with a feeling of assurance.

(2) Only the relation of cause and effect produces certain beliefs.

---

[2]An apparent cause or an apparent effect is something that is taken to be a cause or effect by virtue of past conjunctions in our limited experience, but which is not really a cause because wider experience, including experimental testing in accordance with the rules by which to judge of cause and effect would not maintain the previous simple conjunction. For example, it might appear to me that a broken fuel pump is the cause of my car's failure to start when the real cause is that the carburetor is dirty.

(3) The same feeling of certainty may also be produced by sources that are only similar to cause and effect or are connected to it in some way.

These claims would be compatible if Hume had claimed that sources that were only similar to or connected with cause and effect produce the same feeling as that relation, only in a lesser degree. He would then be able to claim that beliefs based on cause and effect would be stronger than, and override, those arising from other sources. The problem is that he admits that those beliefs not arising from cause and effect 'prevail' at times, over those that do. Admitting this, the strongest claim Hume could make would be that <u>for the most part</u> those beliefs arising from cause and effect are stronger and thus prevail over those arising from other sources. Nor would this claim be easy to maintain. It could be argued that for the most part mankind is convinced of the continued and independent existence of objects, and since that belief does not arise as a result of necessary causal inference, it is not the case that for the most part beliefs arising from cause and effect are stronger.

Even so, Hume does seem to think that some beliefs have greater force than others, if not for the vulgar, at least for wise men, and that those beliefs solidly grounded in cause and effect produce the greatest assurance of all.[3] He

[3]See pp. 39-40 above.

also believes that reflection is required for absolute assurance in many cases and that we should not, therefore, rely totally on nature to provide us with our beliefs. The way in which reflection is superior to nature in providing us with greater assurance is discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter IV

Reasoning and Necessity

Reflective and Non-Reflective Belief

Hume refers to both causal and demonstrative inference making as reasoning. He considers the necessity involved in making causal inferences to be analogous to that involved in making demonstrative ones:

> Thus as the necessity, which makes two times two equal to four, or three angles of a triangle equal to two right ones, lies only in an act of the understanding, by which we consider and compare these ideas; in like manner the necessity or power which unites causes and effects, lies in the determination of the mind to pass from one to the other. (p. 166)

When we know something, Hume claims, we are necessarily determined to conceive it that way: Knowledge is such that "the person who assents not only conceives the ideas according to the proposition, but is necessarily determin'd to conceive them in that particular manner" (p. 95). With belief concerning matters of fact, we are also necessarily determined to conceive a proposition in a certain manner. We are necessarily determined to conceive it, not according to the ideas, but in a forceful and vivacious manner. Whenever we dissent from anyone, we may, Hume concedes, "conceive both sides of the question", but "we can believe only one"

(p. 95). That is, we can conceive only one side of the question in the way that is requisite to believing it. In other words, although the imagination may consider the possibility of the proposition being either true or false, and so conceive both sides of the question, it is necessarily determined to believe only one side. We can distinguish then between two types of necessary determination, C1 and C2. The first, C1, is responsible for our being necessarily determined to conceive a proposition in one manner, i.e. according to the ideas; the second refers to our being necessarily determined to conceive it in another manner, i.e., vivaciously, and in doing so, to believe it.

Both causal and demonstrative inferences may be either unreflective or reflective. In unreflective reasoning we may rely solely on nature for our conclusions; reflective reasoning requires that we give nature some assistance. An example of a non-reflective demonstrative belief is any self-evident truth. Thus, truths like 'Either it is raining or it is not raining at the same time in the same place' and 'Triangles have three sides' are self-evident according to Hume. The mind, even without reflecting on them, must assent to them. It need not appeal to the law of contradiction to know what it ought to conclude. However, if it did, it would be engaging in reflective reasoning. Thus demonstrative reasoning is unreflective in the sense that the mind is forced to draw certain conclusions whether it knows the rules of logic or not; it is reflective when, knowing what the rules

of logic are, it surveys the premises with an eye to determining what inferences can be drawn from them according to the rules.

A parallel can be drawn in the case of causal reasoning. It is unreflective in the sense that the beliefs nature instills in us do not depend on our volition. Just as in demonstrative reasoning what we conclude follows necessarily from our premises, in causal reasoning what we believe is a necessary consequence of our experiences. Reflective causal reasoning, like demonstrative reasoning, takes place when we survey the 'rules of logic' set out by Hume, in order to see if our observations were made accurately and were thus a valid basis for the conclusion arrived at.[1]

Thus unreflective inferences, in the sense defined above, are always necessarily determined. But the fact that we sometimes reason reflectively does not change the fact that the inference we make will also be necessarily determined. The mere fact that we are able to review the nature of the inference, and perhaps be led to a different conclusion as a result, does not change the fact that the inference is determined by nature and not by reflection. The advantage of reflection is that it allows us, in the case of causal reasoning, to look for the sort of data that will either increase the strength of our natural belief, or destroy its necessity by discovering exceptions to the regularity of our observations.

---

[1] See 'Rules by which to judge of causes and effects', Treatise, pp. 173-176.

In the case of demonstrative reasoning, of course, the necessity of the conclusion would be destroyed simply by discovering the possibility of something contrary to it. Thus, the fact that Hume advises us to confirm our beliefs by engaging in reflective reasoning does not mean that he does not think that all beliefs are caused.

Conclusions drawn as a result of reflective reasoning are nevertheless necessarily determined. But I have argued above that conclusions necessarily determined are not always the result of reflective reasoning. Inferences, especially causal ones, need not be reflective or even conscious. Rather, "the past experiences, on which all our judgments concerning cause and effect depend, may operate upon our mind in such an insensible manner as never to be taken notice of" (p. 103), and "experience may produce a belief and a judgment of causes and effects by a secret operation, and without being once thought of" (p. 104). This is the way in which "Nature has determin'd us to judge as well as to breathe and to feel", and she has determined all our judgements, those from cause and effect no less than those elicited by self-evident truths.

General Rules

There are two sources of belief arising from causation. One is the mental habit that results from unexamined experience. The other is reflection. Whichever we rely on for our

beliefs we are influenced by general rules. These general rules have the effect of carrying us beyond what is strictly in accordance with our experiences. It is thus an 'unphilosophical species of probability' and is the source of "what we properly call Prejudice":

> An Irishman cannot have wit, and a Frenchman cannot have solidity; for which reason, tho' the conversation of the former in any instance be visibly very agreeable, and of the latter very judicious, we have entertain'd such a prejudice against them that they must be dunces and fops in spite of sense and reason. (pp. 146-47)

This happens because

> 'this the nature of custom not only to operate with its full force when objects are presented, that are exactly the same with those to which we have been accustom'd, but also to operate in an inferior degree, when we discover such as are similar; and tho' habit loses somewhat of its force by every difference, yet 'tis seldom entirely destroy'd where any considerable circumstances remain the same. (p. 147)

General rules are also the source of "that species of probability deriv'd from analogy, where we transfer our experience in past instances to objects which are resembling, but are not exactly the same with those concerning which we have experienced" (p. 147). Inference from analogy is one of the effects that causation has on the imagination:

> When an object appears, that resembles any cause in very considerable circumstances, the imagination naturally carries us to a lively conception of the usual effect, tho' the object be different in the most material and most efficacious circumstances from that cause. (p. 150)

When this happens it is often the case that accidental

circumstances combine and influence the mind even in the absence of the essential ones. It is in order to correct this propensity of mind that we reflect "on the nature of those circumstances" (p. 148).

In doing this we rely on other general rules, those regarding "the more general and authentic operations of the understanding". When we review the act of mind involved in arriving at conclusions that are the result of applying the first kind of general rule, "we find it to be of an irregular nature, and destructive to all the most establish'd principles of reasoning; which is the cause of our rejecting it" (p. 150). The influence of this second general rule, according to Hume, "implies the condemnation of the former" (p. 150):

> These rules are form'd on the nature of our understanding, and on our experience of its operations in the judgments we form concerning objects. By them we learn to distinguish the accidental circumstances from the efficacious causes, and when we find that an effect can be produc'd without the concurrence of any particular circumstance, we conclude that that circumstance makes not a part of the efficacious cause, however frequently conjoin'd with it. (p. 149)

Thus the second kind of general rule, that regarding "the more general and authentic operations of the understanding" is that by which we judge of causes and effects.[2] The first kind of general rule, Hume says, is an inference of the imagination; the second kind, an inference of the judgement. "The

---

[2]Ibid.

vulgar", he claims, "are commonly guided by the first, and wise men by the second" (p. 150).

It happens that our belief that an object has an independent and continued existence, is, according to Hume's system, the result of the mind adhering to the first kind of general rule. It is, consequently, an inference of the imagination, and not based on 'established principles of reasoning'. Usually when we attribute reality to an object it is on this basis. But we may attribute reality to it as a result of an inference of the judgement. When this happens we conclude that something is real when we conclude that it has a place in the causal scheme of things.

Certainty

Hume thought that only judgements could be true or false (p. 116). "Truth or falshood", he claimed, "consists in an agreement or disagreement either to the real relations of ideas, or to real existence and matter of fact" (p. 458). Hume's utilization of 'real' in this passage emphasizes that we are to understand that the term refers only to those objects to which reality is properly attributed by virtue of their being true causes or effects. It does not refer to the fiction of their having independent existence. If truth consisted in the correspondence of our judgements with the latter, there would be no truth, for in Hume's opinion, there are no independent existences.

Although from a strictly philosophical point of view

when we judge an object to be a cause we do not commit ourselves to its independent existence, when we attribute reality to it we are inclined to slip into the common belief that it does have an independent existence. However, so long as reality is attributed only to causes, the judgement that an object has real existence is true simply because it corresponds to the right object and in spite of the fact that our understanding of real might be the common one.

Belief that arises from true causes must correspond to true effects. The relation between cause and effect, necessary determination, reality, and truth, can be summarized as follows: If the feeling of necessary determination that carries the mind from the impression of one object to the idea of another arises as a result of the repeated observation of the conjunctionof true causes and effects, then the resulting belief that those objects are real is true.

As a definition of truth this one seems circular since it assumes that not all of our perceptions are causes, though the beliefs that correspond to those that are, are true. This suggests that we already have a way of finding out which perceptions are causes, and so already know what would count as a true cause. But this circularity is only apparent. It is only apparent because the statement that true belief corresponds to those perceptions that are causes does not at all imply that we have any sure method for discovering which those causes are. If it were stated more carefully, it need not even imply that there are causes to be discovered. Hume

might have claimed that, only if there were causes would truth consist in the correspondence of belief to those causes.

What the above summary shows is the theoretical relation between true belief and efficacious cause.[3] The epistemological problem is that although our belief in real existence may be true, we can never know it to be so. At best we could have the true belief that our belief was true. But then we could never know if that belief was true, although we might have the true belief that it was. However, it is not necessary to be concerned with this regress. The impossibility of knowledge of matters of fact means that we can never establish the truth of a belief. The best we can do is "hope to establish a system or set of opinions, which if not true (for that, perhaps, is too much to be hop'd for) might at least be satisfactory to the human mind, and might stand the test of the most critical examination" (p. 272).

Beliefs that are satisfactory to the human mind are those about which we feel certain, and it is through 'critical examination' that we can establish that certainty. Once the certainty of a belief has been established, there is little point in establishing the certainty of the belief that that belief is certain. Certainty is a psychological state that we have first hand knowledge of. It is not the sort of thing we need further assurance of.

---

[3]Ibid.

Hume thought that certainty could be established by means of proofs. He described proofs as "those arguments, which are deriv'd from the relation of cause and effect, and which are entirely free from doubt and uncertainty" (p. 124). Hume suggests that it is misleading to classify these arguments as arguments based on probability. He is "oblig'd to comprehend all our arguments from causes or effects under the general term of probability" (Ibid) in order to be technically correct and strictly philosophical:

> 'tis however certain, that in common discourse we readily affirm, that many arguments from causation exceed probability, and may be receiv'd as a superior kind of evidence. One wou'd appear ridiculous, who wou'd say, that 'tis only probable the sun will rise to-morrow, or that all men must dye; tho' 'tis plain we have no further assurance of these facts, than what experience affords us. (p. 124)

Hume here opposes the philosophical sense of certainty, the sort that attends only knowledge, to what we commonly understand by it. It is what is commonly understood by certainty that we may achieve by way of argument from cause and effect. He does not define this certainty.[4] He only gives examples of it. We are certain that the sun will rise tomorrow and that all men must die. Thus, we are certain of those things that have a long history of occurring in a certain sequence, and to which there are no exceptions.

Certainty is a mental state that Hume thinks results from reasoning, reflective or otherwise, based on causation. It

---

[4]Hume, David, An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding, ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge, p. 110.

is causal reasoning that adds solidity and force to ideas and distinguishes them from mere fictions. Fictitious ideas are not believed because "the solidity and force which according to my system, attend those ideas that are establish'd by reasoning from causation are lacking" (p. 124).

Beliefs that result from reasoning have a feeling that is lacking in ideas that are merely vivacious. In comparing the vivacious ideas elicited in us by poetry with 'serious conviction', Hume states,

> But how great soever the pitch may be, to which this vivacity rises, 'tis evident, that in poetry it never has the same feeling with that which arises in the mind, when we reason, tho' even upon the lowest degree of probability. The mind can easily distinguish betwist the one and the other; and whatever emotion the poetical enthusiasm may give to the spirits, 'tis still the mere phantom of belief or persuasion. (p. 630)

He reinforces this stand by correcting his earlier statement to the effect that belief differs from ideas only by the degree of their force and vivacity.

> The second error may be found in Book I, page 96, where I say, that two ideas of the same object can only be different by their different degrees of force and vivacity. I believe there are other differences among ideas, which cannot properly be comprehended under these terms. Had I said, that two ideas of the same object can only be different by their different feeling, I shou'd have been nearer the truth. (p. 636)

Thus to Hume's claim that beliefs differ from other ideas in the degree of their vivacity, we might now add 'and in the way they feel'. This feeling, we are led to believe, arises when we reason. Even the weakest belief based on reason is distinguishable from the liveliest idea that is not: "the

least reflexion dissipates the illusion of poetry and places the objects in their proper light". Earlier Hume established that causal reasoning produced a feeling or impression of necessary determination. Presumably it is because reasoning gives rise to this feeling that reflection dissipates the illusions of poetry. It is this feeling, the feeling of necessary determination, I suggest, that is the feeling characteristic of belief, and that distinguishes it from mere fiction.

This view is supported by the fact that Hume thought that the feeling that attends belief can occur in different intensities, depending on the degree of probability on which a belief is based:

> 'Tis indeed evident, that in all determination, where the mind decides from contrary experiments, 'tis first divided within itself, and has an inclination to either side in proportion to the number of experiments we have seen and remember. This context is at last determin'd to the advantage of that side, where we observe a superior number of these experiments; but still with a diminuation of force in the evidence correspondent to the number of opposite experiments. Each possibility, of which the probability is composed, operates separately upon the imagination; and 'tis the larger collection of possibilities which at last prevails, and that with a force proportionable to its superiority. (p. 154)

Hume thus conceives of beliefs as being stronger or weaker, according to various circumstances. When two beliefs do not concur, the stronger prevails and the weaker is destroyed. Those beliefs that arise directly from causation, he finds are the strongest of all, if not for the vulgar, then at least for philosophers. For people who believe that everything

in nature has a cause, and that there is no contrariety of causes, a belief discerned to arise from cause and effect will always prevail over one which is found to have another source. Reflection is important in that through it, and the use of general rules (of the second sort) we are able to correct our initial judgements by taking into account apparently contrary causes and thus resolve contrariety in our experiences. The resulting judgement, based on a greater number of observations, will have more force than those with a lower degree of probability, and will consequently prevail.

Thus, reflection gives rise to counter-beliefs that are stronger than those which the vivacious ideas of poetry and drama tend to produce. When we are moved by those acts it is because of the influence of the ideas, but those ideas prevail only so long as there are no stronger, countervailing beliefs. As soon as they arise, they destroy the influence of the ideas that effected us in their absence.

Chapter V

Belief and Abstract Ideas

Most of us, if asked what we believe when we have a belief about a piece of paper we see, or are thinking of, would reply "It is white" or "It is rectangular". The sentences in which we formulate to our beliefs contain general terms like 'white' or 'rectangular'. These terms are general for two reasons. Firstly, they can be applied, in principle, to more than one thing; many things other than the paper I am thinking of may be called white or rectangular. Secondly, what we say when we employ a general term to call an object white is not fully specific and determinate. The paper before me is not just white, it is a specific shade of white; it has a specific intensity and brightness, a specific texture and precise proportions. What we express by saying "It is white" or "It is a rectangle" is similarly general. What we believe in this particular case could be believed about other objects as well. Moreover, insofar as "It is white" expresses what we believe, what we believe is not fully specific. In believing that a piece of paper is white, we do not thereby believe that it has some specific shade of white or any specific dimensions. How do we come to employ terms in order to say general things about objects in general ways?

Hume's theory of abstract ideas provides us with an account of this. Hume thought a term was general by virtue of its association with fully determinate particular ideas or impressions. It came to be associated with different particular ideas or objects, solely on the basis of resemblances.

When we have found a resemblance among several objects, that "often occur to us, we apply the same name to all of them, whatever difference we may observe in the degrees of their quantity and quality, and whatever other differences may appear among them" (p. 20). A term acquires significance as a result of the operation of the relations of resemblance and causation. It is through custom that a particular word comes to be associated with a number of particular fully determinate objects, until "after we have acquired a custom of this kind, the hearing of that name revives the idea of one of the objects" (p. 20). Thus, a general term is causally associated with a number of objects; and the objects it is causally associated with are associated by the relation of resemblance with each other.[1]

---

[1]It is worthwhile noting that Hume did not suppose that we always think in ideas. He thought that once the habit by which we come to use a general term is established, we often abbreviate the process of thought by bringing to mind only the general terms and not the particular idea associated with them.

> It is being usual, after the frequent use of terms, which are really significant and intelligible, to omit the idea, which we wou'd express by them and to preserve only the custom, by which we recall the idea at pleasure. (p. 224)

Thus, the objection commonly made against the British Empiricits, that it is absurd to suppose that our thoughts always involve a parade of images, does not hold against Hume.

Thus, for Hume a general idea has three components, the fully determined particular perception, the term commonly found in conjunction with it, and the appropriate mental habit. Thus, to think of an object in general terms is to associate it through some term with other objects that resemble it in some way. We should distinguish them between just imagining a triangle, i.e., having the image of a triangle in one's visual field, and entertaining the general proposition 'This is a triangle'. In the first case, no general associations are made. Consequently, whatever is perceived is inexpressible. Since it has no general significance, it cannot be described. Verbally formulatable or verbally formulated beliefs involve the use of general ideas. Insofar as what is stated, 'It is white' or 'It is rectangular' is what is believed, something general is believed.

But it is not clear whether Hume took all belief involving abstract ideas to be verbally formulatable. One reason for thinking that he didn't is that he thought animals had beliefs, and that those beliefs were based on exactly the same principles and arose from exactly the same sources as belief in people, "no truth appears to me more evident, than that beasts are endow'd with thoughts and reason as well as Men" (p. 176). The actions of animals, Hume claims, "proceed from a reasoning, that is not in itself different, nor founded on different principles, from that which appears in human nature" (p. 177).

However, if the acquisition of general terms requires that

we have the use of language, and verbally formulative belief requires that we understand general terms, then insofar as animals do not have a language their beliefs can not be general. It has been argued by H. H. Price, in Thinking and Experience that images can have general significance without being annexed to terms simply by virtue of their propensity to bring other images to mind.[2] Thus, he argues, ideas may have meaning even if we have no language. It would follow from this on Hume's theory, that general beliefs could be had by non-linguistic creatures. Although Hume does not say anywhere that ideas not annexed to general terms could have general significance, it is possible that he simply did not consider this possibility and that if he had he would have thought that animals had general belief as well as men.

However, if he thought that general belief was necessarily tied to the understanding of language, then he would have had to hold that animal beliefs were fully determinate and specific, and therefore verbally inexpressible, since in order to express even very specific and highly determinate beliefs verbally one must have the use of general terms. However, he could have still consistently maintained that belief in animals arose from the same sources as belief in people.

Thought and reasoning, as Hume understands them in the passage just cited, involves nothing more than inferences

---

[2]H. H. Price, Thinking and Experience, London, Hutchison University Library, 1953, Chapters XIII and IX.

resulting from cause and effect. Hume could have consistently maintained that cause and effect results in animals having strong steady conceptions of objects that cause them to respond by acting or reacting in certain ways and that those 'beliefs' differed from the beliefs most humans have most of the time in that they lacked general significance for the animal. He could have attributed this difference to the fact that animals do not have the capacity to acquire general terms.

Thus, depending on whether Hume thought ideas alone could have general significance he could have maintained either that animal beliefs were general (if ideas along can have general significance) or that they were not (if ideas alone cannot have general significance). What he would have thought can only be conjectured since he does not directly deal with this matter. I would suggest, however, that the first position outlined, that ideas may have general significance on their own, from whence it would follow that animal beliefs may be general, would be the one Hume would favour. My reason for thinking this is that I see no obstacle in Hume's theory to this view, and I suspect that Hume would want to draw the analogy between human belief and animal belief as far as possible.

It is quite clear that Hume thought that inferred belief in humans was general, i.e. was verbally expressible in general terms. Experience leads us to conclude that "An Irishman cannot have wit and a Frenchman cannot have solidity" (p. 146). It also leads us to conclude certain historical

facts like 'Caesar crossed the Rubicon'. It seems that any number of particular, fully determinate ideas or impressions of Irishmen would give rise to the same belief, 'Irishmen cannot have wit', and that this is so in the case of fully determinate particular ideas of Frenchmen, or of ideas of Caesar crossing the Rubicon, or of any other idea we happen to entertain. If so, then Hume's official doctrine that belief is just a lively forceful perception is wrong. If belief were just a lively forceful perception it would be fully determinate, and not general at all. Every different particular idea of an Irishman would be a different particular fully determinate belief. It would be a belief like "This green-eyed red-haired forty year old, five foot three inch tall male Irishman dressed in . . . does not have very much wit anyway." But even this highly determinate belief relies on the use of general terms. In fact, it might be argued, a belief that can be verbally expressed is necessarily general and a fully determinate belief cannot be verbally expressed.

It seems rash to infer from the fact that in entertaining an idea we have a belief that the belief is identical with the idea. We can distinguish between linguistic objects like sentences and the beliefs they give expression to. In like manner, we can distinguish between visual objects and the beliefs they give expression to. In Hume's official doctrine however, he fails to do this. He adamantly maintains that belief is identical with sensation. At the same time, he explains in his section 'Of abstract ideas' how ideas are

related to language and acquire general significance. Wherever he refers to beliefs that we hold he expresses those beliefs in general terms. He thus undermines his own theory by treating belief as though it were something more than just a specific fully determinate forceful perception.

It looks as if Hume made a rather drastic mistake in describing belief. Instead of describing it as a lively idea, he should have claimed that it was the significance that a lively idea had by virtue of a mental propensity to associate it with other ideas. He might have explained that the reason the image of a red apple causes us to believe, 'This apple is red' is that we have a mental propensity to associate that image with other images of apples and with other images of red objects. He might have claimed, then, that a belief is a kind of very complex general idea.

Alternatively, it could be argued that Hume's account of causally inferred belief is not intended to extend to beliefs about general characteristics. This surely leaves us unsatisfied. Causal inference alone is supposed to inform us of real existences. Must we infer that our inference to the conclusion, say, that 'Caesar crossed the Rubicon' is not an inference that informs us of real matters of fact. Moreover, Hume must explain what sort of belief causal inference is supposed to account for. Perhaps fully specific beliefs. Although this may have some plausibility it is most implausible that most of our beliefs are inferred beliefs about fully specific unobserved matters of fact. Thus, even if

Hume's causal account of belief could resolve the puzzles raised in earlier chapters, it seems to be of extremely limited scope and certainly of more limited scope than Hume premises. On the other hand, if the causal theory were to account for the fact that our beliefs are non-specific and general, it would have to be considerably modified.

Chapter VI

Existence and Belief

Some people believe God exists; others believe He does not exist. An adequate theory of belief must account for both these beliefs. It must account for belief in the non-existence of an object, as well as for belief in the existence of an object. For Hume, the question of the existence or non-existence of an object may be raised, as I already mentioned in Chapter I, in at least three different forms.

Any object that is thought of has mere existence, as Hume thought that every idea we think of we think of as existing (pp. 66-67). But we take some objects to have an existence distinct from and independent of the mind. We believe these objects to continue to exist even when we are not perceiving them. This independent existence is the second kind of existence. Objects having independent existence are thought to exist in reality. The third kind of existence is also termed 'real existence', but the application of it is restricted to those objects which are believed to be causes. It is reserved for a system of present impressions and those objects connected to them "by the relation of cause or effect" (p. 108). When real existence in this sense is attributed to objects, there is no implication that the objects referred

to have real existence in the first sense, i.e. independent existence.

Interestingly, Hume thought that the belief that objects have real existence in the sense of independent existence was manifestly false. But he believed that beliefs that objects could have real existence in the second sense could be true (p. 448) and that we could be certain of them (see Chapter V). The first belief Hume considered to be unphilosophical, a belief that the vulgar, as well as philosophers in their unphilosophical moments hold. The second belief is a philosophical one, and is the one that wise men, and Hume, adhere to.

There are, then, two senses in which it ought to be possible to conceive of or believe that an object does not have real existence. It ought to be possible, if Hume's theory of belief is adequate, to conceive that an object does not have the requisite causal connection to be called real, in the second sense, or, that it does not have the requisite causal connection to be called real, in the first sense.

To the question "Wherein consists the difference betwixt believing and disbelieving any proposition?", Hume gives the following response:

> 'Twill not be a satisfactory answer to say, that a person, who does not assent to a proposition you advance; after having conceiv'd the object in the same manner with you; immediately conceives it in a different manner, and has different ideas of it. This answer is unsatisfactory; not because

> it contains any falshood, but because it discovers not all the truth. 'Tis confest, that in all cases, wherein we dissent from an person, we conceive both sides of the question; but as we can believe only one, it evidently follows, that the belief must make some difference betwixt that conception to which we assent, and that from which we dissent. (pp. 95-96)

The difference that belief makes, Hume goes on to say, is to "vary the manner in which we conceive any object" (p. 96), by bestowing on our ideas 'an additional force and vivacity'.

With respect to each of the senses of exist distinguished above, we must raise the following questions: (1) What is an object? (2) What is it for an object to exist? (3) What is it to consider both sides of the question concerning the existence of an object? (4) What is it to believe or disbelieve in the existence of an object?

Hume seems to have two conceptions of what counts as an object. On the one hand, objects are nothing more than perceptions. He states that "'tis impossible that our idea of a perception and that of an object can ever represent what are specifically different from each other" (p. 68). He frequently uses the term 'object' interchangeably with 'idea' and 'impression'. On the other hand, Hume recognizes that it is the prevailing opinion that some of our perceptions "continue to exist even when they no longer make their appearance to the senses" and that we distinguish between perceptions which we take to be entirely dependent on the mind and those we take to have a continued existence when we are not

perceiving them. We take the first to be perceptions and the latter to be objects.

Hume explains that objects are generally thought of as falling into three different groups. The first are "those of the figure, bulk, motion, solidity of bodies", the second those of "colours, tastes, smells, sounds, heat and cold", and the third those of "pains and pleasures, that arise from the application of objects to our bodies" (p. 192). Everyone takes the existence of the third group of perceptions to be completely dependent on the mind, but people are of different minds concerning the manner of existence of the first two groups.

Many philosophers think that the second group of perceptions exist only in the mind but that they nevertheless represent the qualities of objects that exist independently of the mind. These qualities are represented by the first group of impressions. In other words, according to Hume, some philosophers hold that objects having figure, bulk, motion and solidity have real existence despite the fact that the perceptions that represent them exist only in the mind. In order to do this they must allow that the form of an object is separable from its other qualities. But Hume has argued that such a separation is impossible. Colour, for example, can be distinguished from the form that it takes only by a distinction of reason, and not in reality.[1] Insofar as the first

---

[2]See page 2, above.

group of perceptions "exist after the same manner" (p. 192) as perceptions in the second group, if the second group of perceptions is mind dependent, so is the first. So, Hume reasons, these philosophers cannot without absurdity hold that the first group of perceptions has independent existence but the second does not.[2]

Unlike philosophers, the vulgar do not make the mistake of supposing that the first group of perceptions is separable from the second. They subsume the first group under the second group, and take the second group to have an existence independent of the mind. But in doing this, Hume thinks, the vulgar are no more reasonable than philosophers. Reason informs us that all our objects exist after the same manner as the third group of perceptions. Nevertheless, Hume warns us that he intends, in order to explain our belief in the independent existence of objects, to adopt the vulgar's conception of an object:

> I shall call indifferently object or perception, according as it shall seem best to suit my purpose, understanding by both of them what any common man means by a hat, or shoe, or stone or any other impression, convey'd to him by his senses. (p. 202)

Hume has another conception of an object. It is of an impression or idea that has duration. The idea of duration is created when we observe an 'unchangeable object' "to participate of the changes of the co-existent objects" (p. 201).

---

[2] H.H. Price, Hume's Theory of the External World, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1940, pp. 105-113. Price discusses the fallacy of Hume's argument.

It is this experience which is the source of our notion of identity:

> Thus the principle of individuation is nothing but the invariableness and uninterruptedness of any object, thro' a suppos'd variation of time, by which the mind can trace it in the different periods of its existence, without any break of the view, and without being oblig'd to form the idea of multiplicity or number. (p. 201)

The idea of the identity of an object through time cannot be a philosophical view of an object. Philosophically speaking, the idea of the object "must be multiply'd, in order to be conceiv'd at once, as existent in these two different points of time". In conceiving an object to exist through time we receive a series of impressions in which the object to which we attribute duration always appears the same. Thus, a series of impressions is taken to be <u>one object</u> when the mind is not 'oblig'd to form the idea of multiplicity or number' in regard to that object.

The fact that we have an idea of the duration of an object is important to Hume's explanation of why we suppose that objects have independent continued existence. We infer from the fact that an object has continued existence in the past that a similar object of which we have an interrupted perception also has a continued existence. We thus imagine that objects continue to exist when they are not being perceived. It is the conception of an object as having identity through time and as existing when it is not being perceived that is commonly understood both by the vulgar, and by philosophers in their unphilosophical moments.

Thus, to the question, what is an object, we can give four answers: (1) It is either an impression or an idea. (2) It is a complex of impression or ideas closely united in the mind. (3) It is a series of impressions or ideas taken by the mind to be one object having duration. (4) It is what in ordinary discourse we attribute independent existence to.

We can now address the question of what it is to conceive of an object as having existence. I have already stressed the fact that Hume thinks that everything we conceive of we conceive of as existing. He also claims that we cannot conceive of any kind of existence but of those perceptions that have appeared to us in "the universe of the imagination" (p. 68).

> The farthest we can go towards a conception of external objects, when suppos'd specifically different from our perceptions, is to form a relative idea of them without pretending to comprehend the related objects. Generally speaking we do not suppose them specifically different; but only attribute to them different relations, connexions and durations. But of this more fully hereafter. (p. 68)

Thus conceiving of an object as existing <u>is</u> different from conceiving of it as having external or independent continuing existence. This is compatible with Hume's claim that the ideas and impressions of objects conceived in the imagination are no different in their manner of existence than those to which we attribute real existence. What he means by this is that there is no change in the idea of the object when it is conceived as existing and when it is conceived as really existing. The idea remains the same. What changes are the

relations we attribute to it.

Hume explains that when we attribute independent existence to an object we attribute to it the relation of identity with a previously existing object. We also postulate a series of objects or impressions to fill the gap between that previously existing object and the present object. We make this postulation on the basis of our previous experience of objects having duration. This postulation helps us to resolve what would otherwise be a contradiction in our experience. The contradiction arises when the imagination takes two objects occurring at different times to be the same but cannot ignore the fact that since they occurred at different times they must be different objects. In order to resolve this contradiction it imagines that the object existed when it was not being perceived.

This postulation of an unperceived object is based on reasoning by 'a kind of analogy' from our past experience of objects having duration. But any object that exists over time is nothing but a series of objects or impressions. Thus, Hume must not only take clusters of impressions to be one object, as in the case of the melon or the peac, he must also take series of impression to be one continuing object.[3] Reasoning by analogy from a previous series of impressions, the perceiver fills in the gap of subsequent series that are

---

[3]Price, External World, Chapters III and IV. Price argues that Hume's account of an object is circular.

very similar to the previously observed series but which have gaps. Thus, having repeatedly observed a series of impressions of the past of the sort AAAAAAAA, when confronted with the series AAA___AA, the imagination fills in the missing impressions. It reasons in the same way in filling in the gaps of series (or objects) that change over time. Thus, experience of the series ABCDEFG will lead the imagination to postulate the missing EF in the series ABCD__G and the missing BCD in the series (or object) A___EFG, and so on.[4]

Thus in attributing the relation of identity to two different objects appearing at different times and imagining that object to have existed in the interim, the imagination is able to conceive of the continued independent existence of objects. But the idea of the objects to which the identity is attributed is not 'specifically different' from what it would be if the identity relation was not attributed to them. Thus the imagination may conceive of the real existence of objects and when it does this it conceives of them as having different relations than when it merely conceives the objects as existing.

An object has real existence in the second philosophical sense if it is part of the system of impressions of the memory and senses, or part of the system connected to that

---

[4]Ibid.

system by the relation of cause and effect.[5] We thus conceive of an object as having real existence if we conceive of it as part of one of these systems.

What is it then, to consider both sides of the question of whether an object exists or not? On Hume's account it would require that on the one hand, we conceive of an object as existing, and on the other hand, that we conceive of it as not existing. To conceive of an object as existing, is either to just conceive of it (in this case it is conceived as merely existing) or to conceive of it as having certain relations to other objects. To conceive of an object as not existing, then, would be to somehow not conceive of it at all, or to conceive of it as lacking certain relations to other objects. However, not to conceive of an object is not equivalent to conceiving of it as not existing. And to conceive of an object as not merely existing involves a contradiction, since to conceive of an object at all is to conceive of it as merely existing. Thus, conceiving of an object as not existing would involve conceiving of it as merely existing and not merely existing at the same time, which is impossible.

Hume claims that when we conceive of an object as not having existence we exclude it "from all times and places in which it is supposed not to exist" (p. 15). He is clear that existence and non-existence imply "both of them an idea

---

[5]See pp. 5-6 above.

of an object". To conceive of an object at a particular time and place involves conceiving of it as having certain relations to other objects. Conceiving of it as not existing in those times and palces, then, involves conceiving of it as not having certain relations to those objects. We should note that Hume does not think that conceiving of an object as not existing involves excluding it from all times and places, but only from those times and places where it is not supposed to exist. This is consistent with its existing at some time and place where it is supposed to exist, for example, at present, in the mind. Thus, it is possible to conceive of a merely existing object as not having some other kind of relations, not having the relations that an independently existing object would have, or not having the relations that a cause or effect would have.

In order to understand how we would conceive of an object that existed in some way as being different from an object that did not exist in that way, it will help to consider what Hume says about judging differences. Hume does not consider <u>difference</u> to be a relation. He considers it "rather as a negation of relation, than as anything real or positive" (Ibid). He claims that "Difference is of two kinds as oppos'd either to identity or resemblance. The first is called difference of <u>number</u>; the other of <u>kind</u>" (Ibid.).

To conceive of two objects as being different from one another, then, is to find that either they do not resemble each other sufficiently, or that the one object is not

identical with the other. If conceiving of an object as really existing, then involves conceiving it as having a certain relation of identity with a previously existing object, conceiving it as not having real existence would, presumably, be to conceive it as not having the alleged relation of identity.

Thus, although we cannot conceive of something as not existing, since in conceiving of anything we conceive of it as existing, we can easily conceive of some existing thing as not having an external existence. If in considering both sides of the question we imagine an object both to have external existence and not to have external existence, then we will believe whichever proposition strikes us with the greater force.

But in order to conceive of an object as not having real existence it is necessary to judge that it is not similar in some respect to another object. There are two ways in which an object may be conceived of as having real existence. It may be conceived of as having certain causal relations to other objects or it may be conceived of as having certain relations of identity with other objects, and thus of existing independent of the mind. The way in which we conceived of an object as not having real existence would depend on which picture we compared that object to. If we compared an object to a picture of the same kind of object having causal relations we might conceive of the first object as not having any causal relations, and thus, of not being real. If we compared the same object to a picture of an object having certain

relations of identity to previously existing objects, we might conceive of our object as not having real (independent) existence.

How could we be mistaken in believing that an object has real existence. It is clear that as far as Hume is concerned we are always mistaken in believing that an object has independent existence (pp. 210-211). But this is an uninteresting sense in which belief is false. The interesting sense occurs when we attribute causal relations to objects that are not true causes. Presumably this would occur, when basing our conclusions on reflection in accordance with the general rules by which to judge of cause and effect would yield a different conclusion.[6]

To have different ideas of an object then is to conceive the same object in two different situations. In one situation the object, because of its relations with other objects, is taken to have real existence. In the other situation the same object does not have these relations, and is taken as not having real existence. In both cases however, the object is conceived as existing in the sense that it at least exists in the mind as an idea. This is the way in which both sides of the question are conceived.

It is one thing to be able to conceive that an object does not exist. It is another thing to believe it. Hume tells us what not believing that something exists entails. It is not

---

[6]See pp. 31-33 above.

to have the feeling that compels us to assent. But not to believe that X, is, in general, not the same thing as believing that not-X. Nor does the latter follow from the former. My not believing that God exists does not imply my believing my believing that God does not exist. It is possible, however, that Hume took the two to be equivalent. If he did, then he thought that in merely conceiving something we were dissenting from it. In this case, he would have been able to make no distinction between merely entertaining an idea, and holding a negative belief. But this would lead to the absurdity that in merely entertaining the thought that God had real existence, i.e., not believing it, we would be denying that He really existed. I do not think that Hume held this view. The sense of the passage quoted above (p. 95) is that in conceiving both sides of the question we are suspending belief, and waiting for one side to strike us more forcefully than the other.

Hume's problem is that he gives us no account of how in conceiving of an object as not having real existence, that conception can be lively and vivacious and thus result in or constitute belief. In this case there is no present impression to enliven the idea, nor relation of causation to necessitate it. Nor, as already argued, does this conception follow logically from a belief that is vivacious. Thus, even though we conceive of an object as not having real existence, it seems we could never believe it to be so. There would never be any reason to prefer the unvivacious conception of an object not

having real existence to the unvivacious conception of an object having real existence.

Thus, we could never have a vivacious idea to the effect that the Pegasus that exists in our mind does not have real existence. For this reason we must conclude that Hume's theory of belief is inadequate. He claims that beliefs in real existences are strong and forceful by virtue of the relation of causation that gives rise to them and by virtue of the present impressions to which they are related. But beliefs entailed in mere conception, beliefs like 'Pegasus does not have real existence' do not, in any obvious way, derive strength and vivacity from these sources. But Hume gives no alternative explanation of where such beliefs could derive their force from.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Berkeley. Berkeley, ed. Mary W. Calkins, Scribner's, New York, 1957.

Cartwright, R. "Propositions"; Analytical Philosophy, ed. R. J. Butler, Basil Blackwell; Oxford; 1962, pp. 81-103.

Flew, Antony. Hume's Theory of Belief, Routledge and Keagan Paul, London, 1961.

Hume, David. A Treatise of Humean Understanding, ed. L. A. Selby Bigge, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1968 ed.

_____. Hume's Enquiries, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge; 2nd edition, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1961.

Lemmon, E.J. "Sentences, Statements and Propositions", British Analytic Philosophy, ed. Bernard Williams and Alan Montefiore, Routledge and Keagan Paul, London, 1961, pp. 87-108.

Price, H.H. Belief, George Allen and Unwin Ltd., London, 1969.

_____. Hume's Theory of the External World, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1940.

_____. Thinking and Experience, Hutchison University Library, London, 1953.

Smith, Norman Kemp. The Philosophy of David Hume, Macmillan and Co. Ltd., London, 1949.

Stroud, Barry. Hume, Routledge and Keagan Paul, London, 1977.